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SUBJECT: Swazi Government Cracks Down on Opposition

REF: MBABANE 297

¶1. SUMMARY: The September 19 detonation of a small bomb (reftel), which detonated early and killed two of the suspected instigators but left no structural damage, was the catalyst for King Mswati III's decision to make fighting "terrorism" his number one concern. The King's choice of a new government that will be loyal to tradition, and facilitate his crackdown on opposition forces is apparent. On October 16, King Mswati III addressed the nation, announced Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini as the new Prime Minister (PM), denounced terrorism and said any necessary means should be used to stop it. He warned progressive organizations that they will be dealt with accordingly. He expressed anger at South Africa for not condemning the three South Africans involved in planting the bomb. The King encouraged the new PM to use a very firm hand in leading the nation. On November 14, the PM issued a declaration naming four organizations as "specified entities" under the 2008 Suppression of Terrorism Act. At a press conference announcing this declaration, the local media reported that Attorney General Majahenkhaba Dlamini warned the public about associating themselves with these now illegal groups, which could result in prison terms of 25 years to life. On November 15, the government arrested the leader of the People's United Democratic Movement of Swaziland (PUDEMO), Mario Masuku, who remains detained pending prosecution. END SUMMARY.

¶2. On October 16, approximately 30,000 people converged at the Ludzidzini royal residence to witness King Mswati's announcement of Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini as Swaziland's tenth Prime Minister (PM). The King said those calling the bombers "heroes" will be severely dealt with, and called for the choking or strangling of them and their family members -- hopefully, a figure of speech. Referring to South Africa, he said foreign countries that did not issue a statement disassociating itself from acts by terrorists who originated from their countries, are in effect condoning such acts. He said the new Prime Minister has to take a strong line against perpetrators of anarchy, and strongly condemned progressive organizations. The King did not address the major problems facing the nation: poverty alleviation, food insecurity, or the woefully inadequate education and health systems.

BARNABAS SIBUSISO DLAMINI

¶3. PM Dlamini served as the eighth Swazi PM from July 1996 through September 2003. Highlights of his previous term include disobeying a court judgment, which led to the en masse resignation of Court of Appeal judges in 2002, and ordering Parliament to approve the purchase of a jet for the King. He eventually bypassed Parliament and authorized the purchase of a 3.7 million USD jet, although the transaction was never completed. Since 2003, he has served as a member of the King's Advisory Council.

PUBLIC REACTION

¶4. There is little popular support for the King's speech. Private media sources have reported that PM Dlamini is a poor choice, stating that he is contemptuous of the rule of law and opposes democratic principles. Leaders of radical organizations are convinced his extreme views and actions will precipitate more violence in Swaziland.

NEW GOVERNMENT BEGINS A CRACKDOWN

¶5. On November 14, PM Dlamini issued an official declaration that four organizations were "specified entities" under the 2008

Suppression of Terrorism Act, namely: PUDEMO, Swaziland Solidarity Network (SSN), Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO), and the Swaziland People's Liberation Army (UMBANE). The Attorney General has also warned the public that associating with these illegal groups can result in prison terms of 25 years to life. Any person or group found to be abetting, aiding, sympathizing with, sheltering or giving any logistical support to these organizations "invites the wrath of the law."

¶6. On November 15, the government arrested the leader of PUDEMO, Mario Masuku, who remains detained pending prosecution. The Attorney General of Swaziland, interviewed on BBC, contends that it has evidence that Masuku falls under its legal definition of a terrorist. Masuku's son said that police attempted to find incriminating papers regarding how to make bombs at his father's home. Mario Masuku has denied the all charges of terrorism leveled against him and has declared his innocence. According to the press, no seditious written materials were found in Mr. Masuku's possession or home. Due to the inability of the police to locate incriminating evidence against Mr. Masuku, on November 17, the government brought new charges against him for, unlawfully and knowingly giving support to continuation of a terrorist act, for "utterings" Masuku made last September at the time of the funeral of one of the September bombers.

¶7. It should be noted that the 2008 Suppression of Terrorism Act was pushed through parliament before it recessed, with little examination of its implications. The GKOS now considers opposition groups as serious security threats to royalty and is using this Act as a tool to eliminate certain organizations and silence dissidents.

¶8. COMMENT: Dlamini's appointment, the King's speech, and developments in the last few days are in line with local speculation that the GKOS plans to take a harder, more militarized approach to political opposition. The embassy is concerned that the GKOS has reversed direction and is returning to its previous practice of engaging in arbitrary detentions. PM Dlamini has a history of November crackdowns. In November 2000, PM Dlamini re-introduced the right to detain a person 60 days without trial; Masuku, his favorite target, was subsequently arrested during a protest rally, and eventually charged with sedition (he was acquitted in August 2002). In November 2002, PM Dlamini told the judiciary that the King was not obligated to abide by Court of Appeals rulings. His reward for his hard line approach was a seat within the King's advisory body during the last government. This does not give hope that the GKOS will sit down to negotiate with political organizations and civil society anytime soon.

The Ambassador will be meeting with PM Dlamini on Thursday and will express the USG's dissatisfaction with the GKOS actions. Results of that meeting will be reported septel.

PARKER